

## REVIEW OF MPS' EXPENSES

Dear Sir or Madam,

In a representative democracy the authority of MPs derives from voters. Any reformed expenses system must set in stone that MPs answer to their constituents and not just during a general election. I would say any proposal that seeks to install an un-elected authority to which our MPs answer goes against our constitution. (Not a single document it may be, but it does exist) Sunlight is the best disinfectant and the corrupting influence of statism should be resisted.

Any body set apart from Parliament is outside the authority of voters and that would make it wrong. We have seen in the past that a Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards committed to cleaning up the Commons can be hounded from the job. Any nominally independent group would be equally at risk of being subject to pressure from malign actors in Parliament. There are only two groups with the authority to manage MPs expenses - MPs and their constituents. MPs forming a committee of themselves has failed. They came up with quite clear rules covering what was required of them and collectively failed to abide and enforce those rules. It should then fall to us constituents to exercise our natural authority over our MPs.

At the moment a major problem is that MPs do not answer to their constituents except when there is a general election or by-election, and voters have no means to force either. Arranging expenses should be a matter between an MP and their constituents and no one else. It should also be seen as an test of competency and probity. At the moment MPs have failed that test through seeking to muddy the waters, cover up the extent of their troughing and leap on the proposal for an appointed external body. We should question their motives intensely. Is it simply to have another excuse and another scapegoat to blame? A convenient shield of pretend probity to hide behind rather than answer to the people who put them in their position? MPs should shoulder that responsibility themselves and be required to justify their actions to the true source of their authority - the voters.

A potential answer is to leave the system largely alone but make it far more transparent and truly answerable to the people through a recall mechanism. Tighten up what is and isn't covered so there can be no ambiguities.

Detailed expense claims could and should be published \*when they are submitted\* and be required to be published for a reasonable period of time before being reimbursed to discourage speculative spending and submissions. Expenses should also be required to be submitted within a reasonable timeframe of the expenditure to discourage bulk submissions which overloads the Fees Office in much the same way as HM Revenue and Customs is swamped every January.

Alternatively a block grant based on distance from Westminster could be used. A sum of money that MPs can spend on salary, transport, accommodation, staff and other costs in whatever proportion they like in return for an annual detailed and published audit. This would represent a further test of competency.

If MPs cannot manage their own affairs what legitimacy have they for interfering in ours? Millions of self-employed people do their book keeping week in, week out. They have to, to satisfy HM Revenue and Customs. It should not be beyond MPs to record their income and expenditure or employ someone who can. Nor should they be able to exempt themselves from taxation on what is plainly an addition to their salary.

If a system is created that allows MPs to continue abrogating their responsibilities they have no cause to be representing us. We have seen with the current system that complaints have been waved away by saying 'It was within the rules', 'The Fees Office okayed it' and 'The system is wrong'. MPs shirking their responsibilities is widespread and they have become complacent and dependent on rules. It is a groupthink and welfare dependency, a casual corruption and contempt for taxpayers that leaves the public ill served through MPs having a convenient excuse to not behave properly. All that should matter is an MP's own conscience and the opinion of their constituents.

We should not rush to craft a labyrinthian set of rules and a draconian and un-elected regulator to oversee them. That is little different to what we have now and that has failed through collusion between the regulator and the regulated - the Fees Office is subordinate to MPs and has evidently served to facilitate the making of expense claims without much cause to enforcing the rules that govern the current system. The more rules there are the more scope for bending them and breaking them and for obfuscation.

To further exclude the will of voters will not restore trust in MPs and Parliament any time soon.

Without the routine publication of expenses and a means for voters to remove MPs who abuse their position any proposals would not be in the interests of democracy nor in the interest of Parliament. The only necessary regulator of expenses should be the public. Transparency is the key to this. At it's most basic level MPs should ensure they get good value for taxpayers so it is to taxpayers MPs should answer, not yet another quango.

Apparently we have a court of public opinion that extends as far as Sir Fred Goodwin's pension but not into the realms of MP pay and perks. Whatever system eventually is settled on the addition of transparency and a recall mechanism would be a major leap towards reasserting the legitimacy of Parliament by returning power to where it belongs - in our hands.

Yours sincerely,

G Rogers.